Introduction

Fehrenbach, Frank ; van Gastel, Joris

DOI: https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110720488-001

Frank Fehrenbach and Joris van Gastel

Introduction

Here, true beauty resides with its form and hue—
here the works of man stand out in just relation to those of nature,
each supplementing the other.[1]

"There is something repulsive about Naples," wrote the Rome-based German medievalist Ferdinand Gregorovius (1821–1891) in his *Siciliana* of 1872, "this wild chaos of sky-high towering buildings of baroque architecture, the oppressive heat, the dust of the streets, the sense-numbing crowd, does really not fascinate for long; who stays in Naples, is only there because around it, nature has created the most enchanting Paradise […]."[2] That other German traveller, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe (1749–1832), too, found here, some hundred years earlier, "the most astonishing landscape in the world," though for him, the city itself could not be that easily separated from its setting. The light-hearted, lively architecture, the natural and easy-going people, their colourful clothes and ornaments, all are directly grounded in the incredibly fertile surroundings of the *Campania felix*, which, in turn, is bound to the city in an infinite cycle of production and consumption.[3] Nature gets a more negative connotation for Curzio Malaparte (1898–1957), who in his *La pelle* of 1949 describes the city as a mysterious place, "where not reason, not consciousness, but dark subterranean forces appear to govern men, and the facts of their lives."[4] A work wallowing

1 Norman Douglas: Siren Land, London 2010 [1911], p. 196.

2 Ferdinand Gregorovius: Wanderjahre in Italien, 5 vols., vol. 3: Siciliana. Wanderungen in Neapel und Sicilien, Leipzig 1872, p. 16: "Neapel selbst hat geradezu etwas Abstoßendes; dies wüste Chaos himmelhoch getürmter Häuser mit barocken Architekturen, die Schwüle und der Staub der Straßen, das sinnbetäubende Gewühl fesselt wahrlich nicht für lange; wer in Neapel verweilt, bleibt nur, weil die Natur rings umher das zauberhafteste Paradies aufgebaut hat […]."

3 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe: Italienische Reise, 12 March, 13 March, 28 May, 29 May. Cf. Denise Spampinato: Goethe in Naples: A Morphology of *Ordered Chaos*, in: California Italian Studies 3/1 (2012), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/35r0d620.

4 Curzio Malaparte: La pelle, Milan 2010 [1949], p. 43: "un paese misterioso, dove non la ragione, non la coscienza, ma oscure forze sotterranee parevano governare gli uomini, e i fatti della loro vita."

in abjection, here nature itself produces the repulsive from festering disease to misshapen bodies.[5]

Be it as opposing forces, as joint in a productive exchange or rather in a downward spiral, the relationship of the city and its culture with nature has been a common factor throughout Naples' history. Facing the sea and hemmed in between the volcanic Phlegraean Fields and Vesuvius, its site at the bay is unvaryingly described as a "more than noble theatre." Moreover, the volcanic activity makes the surrounding lands incredibly fertile. The classic topos of the *Campania felix*, first formulated by Pliny the Elder, is repeated time and again in early modern accounts of the city.[6] It inspired Renaissance poets such as Giovanni Pontano, who writes of the "eternal Spring" and "abundance" that characterizes these lands and sings the pleasures of Baiae in his *Hendecasyllabi seu Baiae*,[7] while Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* leads the reader from the *locus amoenus* of the Arcadian fields to a darker *sottosuolo*, directed at Naples. It is a *locus horribilis* associated with witchcraft and death, the latter most vividly expressed by the vision of an underground Pompeii, buried under Vesuvius' ashes, the empty "towers, houses, theatres, and temples" almost fully intact.[8]

Naples, too, was a city of gardens. After his victorious entry into Naples, Charles VIII of France would describe the city with its gardens as an "earthly paradise";[9] here, for Tommaso Costo, the palazzi and villas are but "gemstones in an embroidery of verdant gardens, of woods, and of pastures."[10] Highpoint of this garden culture was without doubt the villa of Poggioreale, just outside the Porta Capuana.[11] Here nature, carefully guided by man's hand, was all about pleasure, though iconographies of power—made tangible in a power over nature—played into garden design and particularly the design of elaborate fountains. The sea was, of course, less easy to subjugate, though still Alfonse of Aragon's domination over the *Mare nostrum* becomes a leitmotif in the marble entrance arch of

5 Cf. Ruth Glynn: Naples and the Nation in Cultural Representations of the Allied Occupation, in: California Italian Studies 7/2 (2017), https://escholarship.org/uc/item/1vp8t8dz.

6 Plinius: Natural History, 3.40–41, 59–62. Cf. Francesco Montone: Il *tópos* della *Campania felix* nella poesia Latina, in: Salternum 14/24–25 (2010), pp. 47–58.

7 George L. Hersey: Alfonso II and the Artistic Renewal of Naples 1485–1495, New Haven et al. 1969, p. 59; Giovanni Gioviano Pontano: Baiae, trans. Rodney G. Dennis, Cambridge MA 2006.

8 Jacopo Sannazaro: Arcadia, ed. Carlo Vecce, Rome 2013, pp. 298–299 (XII.31–34).

9 Lettres de Charles VIII, Roi de France, ed. Paul Pélicier, 5 vols., vol. 4, Paris 1903, pp. 187–188 (letter dated 28 March, 1495): "[V]ous ne pourriez croire le beaulx jardins que j'ay en ceste ville, car sur ma foy il semble qu'il n'y faille que Adam et Eve pour en faire un paradis terrestre tant ilz sont beaulx et pleins de toutes bonnes et singulieres choses […]."

10 Tommaso Costo: Il Fuggilozio, ed. Corrado Calenda, Rome 1989, p. 14: "…una graziosa mescolanza di vari edifici compartiti, quasi gemme, nel ricamo di verdeggianti giardini, di selve e di praterie…".

11 Cf. Paola Modesti: Le delizie ritrovate. Poggioreale e la villa del rinascimento nella Napoli aragonese, Florence 2014.

Castel Nuovo, where parergonal space is filled with marine scenes, tritons, sirens, sea creatures, and other references to the waters of the sea.[12]

These two sides of nature permeate the artistic culture of the Italian South, but also its scientific culture. Poetic techniques of enumeration employed to capture the stunning richness of the land and sea overlap with the descriptive techniques of scientific inquiry, flourishing at the turn of the seventeenth century among the Neapolitan branch of the Lincei.[13] Exemplary are the studies of Fabio Colonna, whose detailed observations of snails and shells in his *De purpora* of 1616 are paired with no less detailed illustrations.[14] They are reminiscent of the paintings of Filippo Napolitano, one of the first artists to bring together a collection of *naturalia*.[15] At the same time, the fascination for the volcanic activities of the Campi Flegrei inspired a persistent reflection on the generative powers of nature. As a result, local thinkers—Bernardino Telesio (1509–1588), Giordano Bruno (1548–1600), Tommaso Campanella (1568–1639)—adhered to a particularly vitalistic strain in philosophy, the impact of which ranged from the study of stones to that of the human body.[16] Indeed, for some the human body itself was thought to be driven by forces very similar to those that moved the bowels of the earth. In the Neapolitan *Wunderkammer* of Ferrante Imperato, the objects of science and nature were physically juxtaposed, bearing witness to a fascination with the fluid boundaries between lifeless and living nature, between enlivenment and petrifaction.[17]

The 1631 outbreak of Vesuvius made irrevocably clear that nature should be understood as a highly destructive force as well. Other traumatic events were interpreted along similar lines, and when, in 1647, the people of Naples rose up against the Spanish oppressor in what is known as the Masaniello revolt, the brooding sentiments too were described as a force of nature.[18] Not coincidentally, the revolt was triggered by a newly imposed tax on fruit. As John A. Marino has written: "The so-called nostalgia and escapism of the

12 See Philine Helas: Il castello, la città e il mare. Considerazioni sull'arco di trionfo di Castel Nuovo, in: Tanja Michalsky, Philine Helas, and Joan Molina (eds.): La città e il re. L'ingresso trionfale di Alfonso d'Aragona a Napoli (1443), forthcoming.

13 Cf. Joris van Gastel: Campania felix? Reframing the Neapolitan Still Life, in: Nuncius 32/3 (2017), pp. 615–639.

14 Fabio Colonna: De purpora, Rome 1616. Cf. Alessandro Ottaviani and Oreste Trabucco: Theatrum Naturae. La ricerca naturalistica tra erudizione e nuova scienza nell'Italia del primo Seicento, Naples 2007.

15 Jennifer Fletcher: Filippo Napoletano's Museum, in: The Burlington Magazine 121/919 (1979), pp. 648–650.

16 Biagio De Giovanni: La vita intellettuale a Napoli fra la metà del '600 e la restaurazione del Regno, in: Ernesto Pontieri (ed.): Storia di Napoli, 10 vols., vol. 6.1, Naples 1967, pp. 403–534, here p. 413; Nicola Badaloni: Introduzione a Giovan Battista Vico, Milan 1961, pp. 9–164 (at various instances).

17 Enrica Stendardo: Ferrante Imperato. Collezionismo e studio della natura a Napoli tra Cinque e Seicento, Naples 2001.

18 See e. g., Reinhard Keiser and Barthold Feind: Masagniello Furioso, Hamburg 1709, I, xiii.

pastoral mode spoke to the reality of an agricultural system with limited material resources unequally distributed."[19]

The outbreak of Vesuvius brought about the instant rise to fame of the city's patron saint, San Gennaro, whose liquefied blood had protected the city from the molten lava. In fact, so many blood relics worked wonders in the Neapolitan churches that the city became known as "the city of blood."[20] Moreover, such miracles of liquefaction, too, sparked scientific debates about their nature, and the question as to how these relics should be set apart from normal blood.[21] The theologian Domenico Gravina answered this question by posing that, contrary to normal blood, that of the Saints is very much alive, also in scientific terms—an eternal life, separate from the body, perpetually miraculous.[22] Fluid boundaries of another kind characterize the Neapolitan cult of purgatory, that would lay the foundations for the still popular cult of the "anime pezzentelle."[23] In his *Aeneid*, Virgil found the gate to the underworld among the craters of the Campi Flegrei, but the Neapolitans found such a place even closer to home too. Centuries of mining tuff stone from under the city has left its foundations porous, creating, right under the worshipper's feet, a system of caves that easily doubled as purgatory.

With his *Fisica sotteranea* or "underworld physics" of 1730, the Abbot Giacinto Gimma provided the most comprehensive attempt to date to give the continuities between art and nature a place, building on the latest scientific insights to clear natural history from the "fables" of the ancients. [24] Around the same time, his friend Giambattista Vico published the first edition of his *Scienza nuova*, which, complementing Gimma's natural history, attempts to explain the origins of civilization from man's existential confrontation with the forces of nature.[25] It is the same forces that, in the shape of the increasingly more active Vesuvius, sparked the developments of early volcanology, and, at the same time, challenged artists to develop new ways of framing natural catastrophes.[26]

*

19 John A. Marino: Economic Idylls and Pastoral Realities. The "Trickster Economy" in the Kingdom of Naples, in: Comparative Studies in Society and History 24/2 (1982), pp. 211–234, here p. 212.

20 Lucia Malafronte and Carmine Maturo (eds.): Urbs Sanguinum. Itinenario alla ricerca dei prodigi di sangue a Napoli, Naples 2008.

21 Francesco Paolo de Ceglia: Thinking with the Saint: The Miracle of Saint Januarius of Naples and Science in Early Modern Europe, in: Early Science and Medicine 19/2 (2014), pp. 133–173.

22 Domenico Gravina: Vita e miracoli di S. Gregorio arcivescovo e primate d'Armenia, Naples 1630.

23 Marino Niola: Il purgatorio a Napoli, Naples 2003.

24 Joris van Gastel: Controversial Continuities. Giacinto Gimma and the Art of Marble Intarsia, in: J. Nicholas Napoli and William Tronzo (eds.): Radical Marble. Architectural Innovation from Antiquity to the Present, London/New York 2018, pp. 43–71.

25 Badaloni 1961.

26 Jörg Trempler: Katastrophen. Ihre Entstehung aus dem Bild, Berlin 2013.

As may be clear from these introductory remarks, disciplinary boundaries are easily overstepped when one asks about art and nature in early modern Naples. Aiming to tie together the loose threads sketched here, and more, this book is explicitly thought of as interdisciplinary, including authors from the fields of literary studies, history of science, art history and architectural history, though many of them not as easily fitted in one discipline. Altogether, the book hopes to uncover a unique cultural situation, where literature, art and science meet and interact in their shared adherence to an equally unique environment.

In the first chapter, *Carlo Vecce* analyses a key moment in the creation of Naples' self-image as a city fundamentally shaped by its surroundings and geological circumstances. While in the first version of Jacopo Sannazaro's *Arcadia* (1486) the pastoral setting does not yet explicitly refer to the (nevertheless conspicuously present) city of Naples, the definitive edition published in 1504 develops the mutual permeation of nature and city as a central theme. Nature appears as a "maestra", whose formative powers elicit wonder. Simultaneously, the amene location on the bay is contrasted with its ever-looming chasms and subterranean activities. At the end of the *Arcadia*, Sannazaro celebrates nature with all her *mirabilia* as a *Wunderkammer* in which art and nature intermingle. In doing so, he set the parameters for a way of perceiving Naples and its surroundings that would endure for centuries to come.

That Sannazaro, in turn, could draw on literary examples in which the continuity of antiquity in the Neapolitan landscape was praised, is shown by *Joana Barreto* in her contribution on the reception of Virgil and his tomb at Pozzuoli, in close proximity to Sannazaro's elected burial site. Since the Middle Ages, local worship of Virgil had placed an emphasis on his particular thaumaturgic abilities, serving to advance the health and fertility of Naples. In the fifteenth century, the beauty of the ancient garden landscape and its darker chthonic side, also thematized in Virgil's three canonical poetic works, became politically charged. Barreto demonstrates how, during the reign of the Crown of Aragon, and especially under Ferdinand I, aspects of the idealized Arcadian landscape were associated with the idea of a new Golden Age: a utopia of ideal governance under the sign of Pan, driven by political-natural forces.

In each topographic representation, visual and literary topoi are confronted with contemporary perceptions. *Harald Hendrix* explores an impressive shift in this relationship. The coming into being of Monte Nuovo at Pozzuoli in 1538 triggered numerous literary responses, characterized by a remarkable degree of precision. This catastrophic event, which suddenly transformed an entire landscape and caused a new mountain to rise out of the ground, could no longer be adequately represented within existing frameworks of deductive humanist scholarship, thus inviting new descriptive techniques. Hendrix shows how, in the late sixteenth century, a new inductive approach brought forth a form of hybrid travel literature. These texts, in which the factual and the literary frequently overlap, display a characteristic blend of historical learning and contemporary experiences, thus anticipating imaginations of Naples in the age of the Grand Tour.

In his contribution, *Christof Thoenes* (†), the great expert on the artistic and urban history of Naples, looks into the city's tradition of the *veduta*. In contrast to other major European cities, from the fifteenth century onwards the Neapolitan *vedutisti* sought to situate their city within its exceptional surroundings. Hereby, the boundaries between urban and rural space became transparent, thus mirroring the actual historical situation, which was marked by the constant encroachment of the densely populated city onto its environs. Within this dynamic, the image of Naples is inseparable from its natural surroundings, just as, conversely, the extraordinarily fertile volcanic soil penetrated gardens and small fields within the city's built-up areas. Particularly German travelers in the eighteenth century—notably Herder and Goethe—interpreted this presence of nature as a liberation from societal constraints. The "natural" in Naples thus became a metaphor for an existential reconciliation, a way of escaping feelings of alienation engendered by a courtly and bourgeois existence.

How, though, would a traveler in the early seventeenth century have viewed this city with its architectural and artistic treasures, embedded in such a beautiful landscape? *Sabina de Cavi* analyses the travel journal of the papal secretary Giovan Battista Confalonieri, who visited Naples, approaching by land from Rome, in the spring of 1616. The author pays tribute to the city on the bay in its scenic environment and with respect to the local materials from which it is built; in doing so, it becomes apparent that the views from the city onto the sea played an important role. Equally significant is the comprehensive term of "treasure", the "thesaurus" with which the Jesuit extols the religious, as well as artistic and natural treasures of the city. Among these, the most renowned natural-scientific *Wunderkammer* of early modern Europe, the *Museo* of Ferrante Imperato, stands out. It is here, at this 'modern', pioneering sensation, that Confalonieri's stay in Naples culminated.

Art and nature in Naples—each of these words denotes a problem, which *Helen Hills* explores in her contribution on the overwhelming presence of silver in the baroque city. Hills reconstructs a hidden flow of materials that originated in the South American Andes and ended in the numerous reliquaries and liturgical objects of Naples. It was the Spanish colonial empire that set this flow in motion. Hills sees the branching-off of silver out of the circular flow of money, and its fixation in the *main morte* of the church as a fundamental mechanism of colonialism, which defines 'nature' as something to be subjugated and ruled over. Transformed into the treasure of the church—first and foremost in the reliquary treasure of the Cappella del Tesoro—the silver does, however, retain its excessive qualities, which in terms of both exploitation and wastefulness, are accompanied by social repression.

The metonymic relation between material and meaning is also examined by *Damian Dombrowski* in his contribution on the bronzes commissioned in 1635 from Giuliano Finelli for the Cappella del Tesoro. The question regarding the choice of material for the most extensive cycle of over life-size bronze sculptures in Italy leads Dombrowski to the 1631 eruption of Mount Vesuvius and the rise of San Gennaro as the foremost patron saint

of Naples. The numerous blood miracles throughout the city culminated in the periodical liquefaction of his blood in the Cappella del Tesoro. Here, a material analogy between lava, metal and blood can be established, an analogy that also reveals itself in the artistic form of the bronze sculptures. Dombrowski further shows that Neapolitan natural philosophy and science placed central importance on processes of transformation between the materials and their various states, thereby also referencing the progression from life to death.

The following contribution by *Sergius Kodera* is dedicated to the most eminent natural philosopher of early modern Naples, Giovan Battista della Porta. His scientific practice contained performative elements with close links to the theatre and stage technology. Departing from the magnet as an exemplary object of scientific inquiry, Kodera shows how, for Della Porta, the transitions between "dead" matter and living bodies was of central importance. In his comedies, in turn, Della Porta lets his characters act according to a form of experimental magnetic arrangement. Here, the forces of sympathy and antipathy act as common denominators for both natural and social relationships. The actual object of this erotic bond in the world of the living is the magnetic love charm. Thus, Kodera traces the paradox in which, during a period of heightened social artificiality—particularly in courtly contexts—, social order simultaneously appears as naturalized.

During its heyday in the seventeenth and eighteenth century, Neapolitan still-life painting extended beyond the tradition of easel painting to encompass the field of architectural ornament, thus transforming religious spaces into colorful pictorial spaces. *Nicholas Napoli* contrasts the Neapolitan interest in elaborate ornamental floral arrangements and valuable architectural materials with the Dutch still-life tradition that still dominates scholarly literature. Whereas northern flower painting is embedded in a critical discourse, in which reality and fiction, sensuous attraction and morality, and sensuality and meaning are contrasted in intriguing ways, the architectural flower still lifes of Naples follow a different path. Floral arrangements convert actual spaces into synesthetically enchanting pictures, which equally reference Roman antiquity and praise divine creation, while integrating the inserted images within the overall composition of precious materials.

Every now and then, political constellations foster artistic expressions that may unintentionally open up new modes of perception. In his essay on Neapolitan seventeenth-century fountains, *Frank Fehrenbach* analyses the multifaceted interplay between viceregal demonstrations of power and the enjoyment of scenic views. Against the backdrop of the bay of Naples, the fountains stage the coastal and marine surroundings as a stunning scene. With their typological roots in triumphal arches, some of these fountains anticipate the arrival of the royal fleet entering into the city space, an *entrata* that was never realized. As an enactment of "emptiness", the fountains celebrate, at the same time, the splendid view onto the beautiful landscape, and also—through visually superimposing freshwater with the salty sea—the extraordinary fertility of the *Campania felix*.

Joris van Gastel's contribution illustrates how strongly the geological conditions of the city determined its architecture and how, in turn, these conditions were intensified

through architecture itself. The notorious "porosity" of the local tuff stone, which builds the point of departure for Walter Benjamin's and Asja Lācis' elegant description of Naples, is not only visually dominant in the baroque city, but also allowed for the erection of buildings from the very material on which they stand. The incomparable expression of this metamorphosis is Fanzago's Palazzo Donn'Anna at Posillipo. Situated at a spectacular site of transition between sea and city, it functioned both as a stage and as an auditorium. Referencing Roman maritime villa architecture, the palace opens itself up to the bay, while, at the same time, forming a part of the *theatrum* of the city as viewed from the sea. With the direct exposure of its material to salt water, the Palazzo affirms its own impermanence, thereby accentuating these ephemeral qualities as a leitmotif of Naples' close connection with nature.

In his contribution on the emblematic Mount Vesuvius, *Sean Cocco* devotes himself to the concentrated intertwining of sensory observation, visual and linguistic representations and scientific methods. Unlike, for instance, the moon's paradigmatic role in the history of science, the volcano, which is intimately linked to Naples' identity, is a paradoxical structure, being at a point of convergence between geological stability, intermittent eruptive activities and rapidly changing visibility. As a geological formation, onto which the history of natural disasters, as well as the history of their representations has been inscribed, Vesuvius becomes a template for an environmental history in which natural and cultural evolution are inextricably woven together. Cocco also demonstrates how Vesuvius formed the focal point of a variety of debates concerned with theories of representation and epistemology, including the role of perception, prior knowledge and techniques of portrayal, phenomenology and experiment, image and text, abstraction and contingency, and, last but not least, eyesight and hearing.

How though, does Vesuvius evolve through the course of Naples' pictorial history? And what does this tell us with regard to the city's changeable identity? In the concluding chapter of this volume, *Maria Toscano* traces the main iconographic trajectories between the eruption of 1631 and the age of enlightenment. Initially, in the seventeenth century, the catastrophic event spawned mainly textual narratives. During the course of the eighteenth century, however, Vesuvius gave rise to a new pictorial genre, which turned the volcano into a picturesque object. This shift in meaning from a catastrophic mountain to the sublime subject of a physico-theologically tainted sense of wonder was also brought about by travelers and foreign visitors to Naples. Indeed, the volcano increasingly became an object of curiosity—not only was it compared to pyrotechnic machinery, but also miniaturized into souvenirs accordingly and disseminated throughout Europe. With the ensuing scientific exploration of Vesuvius—among these, William Hamilton's investigations were groundbreaking—the alliance between the scientific and pictorial preoccupation with the mountain gradually dissipated, while, paradoxically, the importance of graphical representations for scientific purposes rose steadily from this point onwards.

This publication is the result of a conference, jointly organized with Carlo Vecce, that took place in September 2015 in the Antisala dei Baroni of the Castelnuovo in Naples. Great thanks are due to all participants as well as to Sue Ryall for assisting in the organization of the conference and Daniel Mayr, Antonina Tetzlaff, and Gregor Meinecke for their untiring editing, proofreading and precious suggestions. We are very grateful to Katja Richter and Arielle Thürmel from De Gruyter and Petra Florath for their care, patience and above all for the realization of a beautiful book. The Fritz Thyssen-Stiftung, the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung as well as the Università degli Studi di Napoli "L'Orientale" supported the conference in Naples and the publication of this book unbureaucratically and generously, for which we would like to give our heartfelt thanks: *grazie assaje*!